

II Sysops

A bi-monthly newsletter for, and by, Apple II sysops
Issue 7 July/August 1992

Board-by-Board News

What's happening on bulletin boards around the world

LLUCE may not make it to market.

In May, Lance Taylor-Warren announced that he would immediately start taking orders for LLUCE, and promised to either release it by September 1 or return all payments. According to Mr. Taylor-Warren, only three people have send in checks or credit card drafts for the new software. Without a significant increase in the number of orders, it is possible LLUCE will never be released. At least fifty orders are needed before September 1.

LLUCE will retail for \$125. Upgrades from GBBS "Pro" are \$50, upgrades from other BBS packages (even non-Apple) are \$75.

Quality Computers introduces support BBS +1 313 774 2652

Pro-Quality is a new BBS providing support for Quality Computers customers. Anyone may call the system and download any of the Beagle Bros Oldies, formerly available only on the Beagle Bros BBS. Technical support is also available through the system; any person with Internet access may send questions to tech@pro-quality.cts.com.

FutureNet/Internet gateway in place.

FutureNet users can now send mail to the Internet and vice versa. From any

FutureNet BBS, send mail to %GATEWAY@#6, and include the destination's Internet address as the first line of the message. From any Internet site, send mail to damin@ackerman.cba.csuohio.edu. Include the destination's FutureNet address as the first line of the message and type END as the last line of the message.

New version of METAL released.

METAL v1.07.00 includes a number of miscellaneous changes and enhancements, including a one-page scrollbar for the sysop.

Prime BBS released to Public Domain

The Prime BBS software has been released to the Public Domain and is now available from most commercial online services, as well as The II Sysops BBS. Altogether there are eight disks, including source code and documentation.

Release of ProLine 2.0 delayed.

The Morgan Davis Group has delayed the release of ProLine 2.0 for at least a month. It may be available by the time this issue goes to press. A number of sites have been seeded with the beta version and are actively testing it.

ACOS USRobotics modem driver

Paul Parkhurst has written modem drivers for US Robotics modems for ACOS. The drivers sell for \$10, and will be released only if at least 40 orders are received.

Ilgs compatible computer rumored.

There has been a lot of talk lately about the possibility of an Apple Ilgs-compatible computer called Avatar. Rumors have been raging about what features it will have, but we can only be certain of only one thing: If it ever comes to market, it will receive more attention from its maker than the Ilgs is currently receiving from Apple.

Seven Hills offers amnesty program

Through local user groups, Seven Hills Software (GraphicWriter, Font Factory, etc.) is offering an amnesty program for Apple II users using pirated copies of their programs. By paying a low fee, you can become a registered user and be eligible to purchase the diskette and manual at a reduced price. Contact the Seven Hills Partner in your local Apple User Group before September 31 for more information.

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To Our Readers:

Most of you who are reading this are attending the Apple Central Expo. I hope you're having a good time, and I certainly hope you'll consider a subscription. It's probably one of the least expensive things available at the Expo.

II Sysops has been around for just over a year, and in that time we've grown a lot. From our first issue which was printed on a dot matrix printer, to this latest issue which is our biggest ever, we've been working hard to bring you the most interesting and timely stories about the online Apple II community.

A lot of people think the Apple II has no future. They think it's dead. I don't, because I know that I have an Apple IIgs that I use every day. And I believe an Apple IIe or IIgs is the perfect computer to run a BBS on, regardless of what type of users you want to attract. There may be more IBM BBS packages available out there, but none can compare to the big three (GBBS, Metal, and ProLine) available for the Apple II. And Apple II sysops are highly dedicated, loyal, and knowledgeable when it comes to the systems they run.

With modems beginning to enter mainstream society, the importance of the local BBS is getting bigger and bigger. There are already a few government-funded BBS's out there; I expect many more in the years to come. The "electronic town meeting" we've been hearing about on the evening news can be easily accomplished with modems. And more and more email networks are connecting to the Internet making it accessible to more people around the world than any other online service.

From schools to businesses, everyone should realize the importance of the modem and the electronic bulletin board system. They will be around (in one form or another) for a long time to come.

Thanks for reading!

Doug Granzow

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II Sysops

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Canada	2.70	6.50	11.00	19.75	27.00
Elsewhere	3.10	7.50	13.00	24.00	33.00

Maryland residents add five percent sales tax.

(All rates are in U.S. dollars. Payment must be made in U.S. funds.)

BACK ISSUES:

Back issues are available for the same price as subscriptions, subject to availability.

ADVERTISEMENTS:

Companies may place advertisements in the newsletter, if space is available.

Rates (for black & white ads, you provide a master copy) are \$50 for a full page, \$25 for a half-page, etc.) Inserts are also available, ask for details.

OUR BBS:

Anyone may call The II Sysops BBS at +1 410 549 2584. With a USRobotics Dual Standard, we support up to 14,400 bps. We have a number of public domain and shareware files available for download, as well as System 6.0 for the GS and ProDOS 2.0.1.

DISKS:

We now sell 3.5" shareware and freeware disks for \$3.50 each.

Please specify which disk you want when you order.

Disk 1: Prime BBS. Disk 2: ProTERM demo, ANSITerm demo. Disk 3: AppleNet.

ProLine 2.0

It's lasted nearly a decade, which is quite an achievement for any piece of software. With this new version, the Morgan Davis Group has assured themselves that it will be around for a long time to come.

For *// Sysops*

By **DOUG GRANZOW**

Since 1984, ProLine has been quietly carving a niche in the online Apple II world. It started out as a fairly bare-bones system, but it has grown into a heavily feature-laden application. The release of ProLine 2.0 (and its companion, ModemWorks 3.0) brings the ProLine BBS into the '90s.

Because *// Sysops* has not previously reviewed ProLine, this review will treat ProLine 2.0 as a new product, not an upgrade of a previous one. We were given a pre-release version of the software to base the review on; as of press time, it has not been released yet. Since we did not get the printed documentation, we cannot comment on it.

Installation

The first thing a new sysop has to do, of course, is install the software. ProLine uses a program called Baby Backup to copy files from the master disks to the sysop's hard drive. (Yes, ProLine requires a hard drive with at least five megabytes. A person without a hard drive has no business trying to run a public BBS, regardless of what software is used.) This takes about thirty minutes. Once this is complete, the sysop goes through a simple configuration process, telling ProLine about his or her computer, modem, printer and hard drive. The sysop then sets up some basic accounts on the BBS, including the root user account, the guest account, and the "register" account, which allows users to set up new accounts when they call.

For sysops upgrading from ProLine 1.8, a "upgrade" script is run to help install the new software without destroying important files (mostly those located in the `$/etc` directory). A new version of the `plush.m` file is included, and the script will ask if you want to use it. All of the old manuals will be saved in a separate directory (unless ProLine is told to delete them), in case the sysop wants to preserve some of them.

A number of "modemcaps" are included, which are basically the drivers to initialize the modem. A sysop should be able to get any modem to work with at least one of these without a problem. However, if necessary, an interactive modemcap editor is provided that gives the sysop complete control of how ProLine communicates with the modem.

For G\$ users with a high speed modem, a special cable is required. This cable is wired to allow flow

control, resulting in higher throughput. The cable is available from many sources, including Elpe Enterprises (\$13; address listed on back page). The cable needed is the same one recommended by InSync for use with the Apple IIgs and ProTERM.

Once installation is complete, the system is ready to begin accepting calls. At the "waiting" prompt, a screen saver is activated after a period of non-activity. From this prompt, ProLine will either answer the phone or accept commands from the keyboard. Any C-Shell command can be entered from this prompt, giving the sysop the power to perform tasks without actually logging in. This also means that any person with a knowledge of ProLine could walk up to the computer and issue sysop-level commands; a potential drawback if the system is going to be run in a public place, such as a school. (This seems to be a security leak common to most BBS software, unfortunately.)

New Callers

When a new user calls the system, he or she is taken through the registration process, which asks for a name, phone number, and mailing address. (By modifying the "register" account, a sysop could set the system up to ask for other information and have it mailed to the sysop.) Once this is completed and the user has selected a login ID and password, the system grants the user staff-level access. This usually includes access to a personal subdirectory (described below), and access to send and receive Internet mail (provided the BBS is networked), as well general access to the conferencing system, file system, and game area. There is no need for the sysop to validate the user. (This can be modified also; a sysop may wish to deny network mail access until the user's personal information can be verified, for example.)

When a user account is created, the user is given a subdirectory in which he or she can store files. The default signature and login files for that user are placed in this directory. The directory also provides an easy way for a user to save a message which has useful information in it, or to temporarily store a file posted in a newsgroup for later downloading.

The signature file is a short text file appended to any mail sent by that user. It usually contains the user's name and email address, and often an interesting quote or saying.

Once successfully logged into the BBS, the user's individual login script is executed. The login script

(changeable by the sysop or user) usually checks for system news, checks for new email, displays a line from the "fortunes" file, and runs the "today" program, which reports what happened today in history. After the login script is executed, the user enters his or her default command interpreter.

User Interface

ProLine comes with two interpreters. The "real" one, called the C-Shell, or csh for short, is where all of the power lies. In csh, the user is presented with a prompt (like the Basic System prompt "J") from which any command can be entered. Each "command" is really the name of a program or script located in the \$/bin subdirectory. ("\$/" represents the main ProLine subdirectory, such as "/HARD1/PROLINE", so "\$/bin" expands to "/HARD1/PROLINE/bin".) Programs are written in ModemWorks, an enhanced form of Basic. For example, a user could type "ls -l", which would run the program "ls" and pass the "-l" parameter to "ls". The "ls" program lists all of the files in the current directory (like the ProDOS CATALOG command). The "-l" option controls how the files are listed. ("-l" gives a "long" listing, including file types, sizes, and creation dates, as opposed to a listing of names only.)

The C-Shell mimics Unix for the most part, even down to the "man" entries which describe commands. Typing "man ls" would display complete documentation on the ls command. Each and every command has a detailed manual entry to go with it, written in plain English. The entire set of online documentation takes up over 400K of disk space. The beauty of it is that you only read what you want, when you want to, and you don't have to flip through a big printed manual to find what you need.

The second interpreter is called Plush, short for ProLine Users' SHell. Plush is an easy-to-use menu interface. It is completely sysop-configurable, making it easy for the sysop to customize his or her system without any programming. For the user who is not accustomed to a blank command prompt, Plush is the way to go. Usually there is an option selectable from the main Plush menu which allows the user to drop into the C-Shell. That way, the user can begin to learn to use the power of csh while still being able to fall back to Plush.

For years, ProLine has generally been regarded as having a difficult and cumbersome interface. Although Morgan Davis has made changes to address this issue, including the introduction of the Plush a few years ago, the software still has not fully embraced the common select-an-option-from-the-menu interface so often found on GBBS or FutureVision systems. However, Apple II users of late have turned into a more technical oriented group. They want software that pushes the capabilities of the Apple II computer, regardless of how easy it is to use. More and more Apple II users are becoming programmers, and they are accustomed to command line interfaces, such as the

C-Shell found on ProLine systems. Ease-of-use is less of an issue with Apple II users. (Besides, pull-down menus are in the future for all online systems. A prediction: In five years, most BBS's have a GUI, or text equivalent, and users will be able to select options with a mouse.)

Public and Private Messages

The Electronic Mail system is full featured. Unlike GBBS, which simply shows the user's mail in order then deletes it, ProLine presents the user with a list of all of the letters in his or her mailbox. From this list, the user can read mail in any order, and only letters marked for deletion are actually deleted. Including text from the letter you are replying to is as easy as pressing "I" and RETURN; including or importing text from other letters or text files is also fairly simple.

Typically the most important part of a BBS is the public message section. On ProLine, it's called the Conference System (CS for short). The Conference System has a number of sysop-defined conferences. Each conference has up to six different sysop-defined topics. For example, a BBS may have a conference named "apple2" with topics named "net", "naug", "binaries", and "gs". (CS would refer to these as apple2/net, apple2/naug, etc.) Assuming the user has joined the apple2 conference, pressing return repeatedly will cause CS to go through all of the apple2 topics and display new messages.

With ProLine 2.0, CS has been redesigned to closely parallel the mail system, so that the same keystrokes perform the same functions. This means that replying to posts or including text is just as easy as it is in the mail system.

Unfortunately, CS is not well suited for supporting a large number of networked conferences. The six-topic limitation and conference/topic setup make it difficult to give a newsgroup a meaningful name. The Usenet newsgroup comp.sys.apple2, for example, would probably be called apple/net or apple/chatter. Since the actual newsgroup name (comp.sys.apple2) will appear in the header of each message, this is not a big deal, but it would be easier if there were some way for the user to select newsgroups based on their actual names.

The sysop has the power to define conferences and topics, and can define the maximum number of active messages for each topic, whether or not a topic is networked, where to mail posts to if the topic is networked, and whether or not to allow users to join the conference on their own. The sysop can also give most of these powers to a moderator, who can also keep track of who reads messages, kill inappropriate postings, and perform other maintenance tasks.

Networking

In order to carry a networked newsgroup, the sysop needs to find another ProLine (or compatible)

BBS which already carries the newsgroup and is willing to provide a newfeed. Typically, ProLine systems call several other systems to get all of the newsgroups they want. (My BBS currently calls four others daily to get net messages for about a dozen newsgroups.) Once the remote system has set things up, the sysop can set up his system to call the remote BBS on a regular basis.

Networking with another BBS also provides an electronic mail link to the Internet. Through the Internet, you can send email to hundreds of thousands of people and organizations around the world.

The hardest part about networking is finding another site willing to provide an email link. There are many ProLine sysops who are more than happy to help out another ProLine sysop (myself included), but everything has its costs in the form of long distance charges and disk space, and not everyone can afford to be so generous. The lucky sysop will be able to get news and email from a ProLine or Unix site that is a local call.

The networking software in ProLine is robust. Once things are set up, it nearly runs itself. For the most part, you don't lose any messages, and you don't get any duplicates (not due to ProLine, anyway; dupes from other sources do happen occasionally). The daily maintenance report includes information on bytes sent and received, broken down by BBS, and calculates transfer speeds.

Previously, networking sessions were limited to plain Xmodem file transfers. With ProLine 2.0, any transfer protocol can be used, including Zmodem. When I tested it on my system (using a US Robotics Courier HST), transfer rates were typically in the 800-900 cps range; nearly 100% efficiency.

File Transfers

The file transfer section of ProLine, unfortunately, is its weakest point. It uses a creative library metaphor which gets old quick. I can see how this arrangement would make file transfers easy to understand for someone who is new to telecommunications, but because it is so different from any other system, that same person would be lost on another BBS.

The "library" is divided into up to 16 "card catalogs" (called volumes on other file transfer systems). Files are entries in these card catalogs. Unlike other systems, files may be "cross-referenced" in several different catalogs. On the sysop's disk drive, all files are thrown in the same directory, regardless of which catalog or catalogs they are filed in.

With the release of ProLine 2.0, all major transfer protocols are supported, including Zmodem.

Sysop power

ProLine's capabilities behind the scenes are its strongest point. A large collection of programs are available to perform any number of tasks for maintaining the system.

A maintenance script, which runs automatically

once per day, sends email to the sysop, reporting on vital statistics of the BBS, such as free disk space, the caller log, and networking activity. This script can be customized to perform any tasks the sysop desires.

Sweep is a simple file management utility with performs most ProDOS tasks. Those same file commands are also available from the C-Shell in the form of various shell commands. Cp copies files, mv moves files, rm deletes files, ls lists files, cat views files, cd changes directories, pwd displays the current directory, and so on.

ProLine has the unique capability of allowing the sysops to drop into Basic.system to look at or edit program code, even from a remote system. A sysop who spots a bug can immediately look at the program code and (hopefully) fix the error.

When the sysop is at the local console, he has access to IntelTerm Pro, a full-featured terminal program with a built-in scripting language. IntelTerm Pro is simple to use (the documentation is less than a page long), and perfect for making that quick call to another system to check for or send mail. It even supports protocol file transfers. The biggest drawback is the lack of a copy buffer; with one it would be possible to use its scripting feature to write an offline message reader.

For Apple IIgs sysops, there's a command called "synctime" which dials up the NIST atomic clock in Colorado and automatically resets the IIgs clock during a 20-second phone call. It even automatically adjusts the clock when Daylight Savings Time begins or ends. I have synctime entered in the crontab file to run once per month; my IIgs clock is usually about 60 seconds fast after a month.

In Conclusion

A lot of people point out that ProLine is the most expensive BBS software available for the Apple II. This is true, but ProLine is also the most complete BBS software available for the Apple II. A person could set up a ProLine on his Apple computer and not use any other programs. Everything that person could ever need to do to maintain the BBS can be done within ProLine, and without additional programming.

If you have any problems with the software at all, Morgan Davis is available for support. In my experience, he's always been quick to respond with assistance. We've all heard horror stories about software publishers that take forever to respond to mail asking for help, but that's something the Morgan Davis Group is not guilty of.

Overall, there aren't very many bad things I can say about ProLine. The prefix "Pro" is overused in the Apple II world (ProTerm, ProSel, ProTalk, ProTech...), but ProLine is the most professional BBS out there. From the moment a user logs on, he or she knows that they are connected to a real BBS, not just some system set up by a kid whose parents thought a modem would be a nice toy.

Reader Mail

Dear II Sysops,

Today, I received my complimentary issue of your *II Sysops* newsletter. Thanks for getting it to me so fast! Though I am not currently a sysop, I am pondering the idea and I think I can gain some valuable knowledge from your newsletter.

I also have a question that I have been asking on BBS networks all over the place and I can't seem to find an answer. Perhaps one of our more than 200 *II Sysops* readers can answer this question.

Is there an offline message reader (OMR) available for the Apple IIe that will download a message packet, let the user type messages and responses offline, and then upload the reply packet to the BBS where the BBS takes over and automatically places the replies in the appropriate message bases?

Such OMR's currently exist for IBM compatibles (i.e. Silly Little Message Reader) and the Mac (i.e. Freddie, I believe). I know the OMR technology is relatively new, but it seems that someone would be working on an OMR for the Apple II series.

If someone is, in fact, developing an OMR for the Apple IIe is (s)he also working on making the OMR so it is capable of ZIPing and unZIPing IBM text? Apparently, this is necessary if an Apple II user wishes to use the "QWK" mail door on an IBM BBS for an OMR.

I am aware of AGATE069 and its ability to unZIP files, but I have yet to find software for the Apple IIe that will ZIP files.

Wouldn't it be nice if Apple II series users had an offline message reader that is capable of downloading a ZIPed message packet from an IBM board, letting the user type messages offline, and then ZIPing the file for uploading back to the BBS so the BBS can take over from there? **JUST THINK OF THE CONNECT TIME IT WOULD SAVE!**

There you have it, folks! Is there anybody out there in-the-know?

Kurt Schaaf
Hastings, MI

Kurt,

Other than those available for use with GENie or other commercial services, I'm not aware of any existing OMRs for the Apple II line. I suspect the major obstacle is the ability to ZIP files, as you mentioned. (Paul Parkhurst has an unZIPing program, but there is no way to ZIP files on a II.)

There are, however, OMRs in development for the Apple II. A group of ProLine sysops are working together to write one, and a group of FutureVision sysops are working together to write one also. Both of these would probably be BBS-specific at first, meaning the ProLine OMR would only work on ProLine systems, and the same for the FutureVision OMR. If anyone is working on such a program for GBBS sites, we don't know about it.

Editorial

By DOUG GRANZOW

Recently, I had the opportunity to chat with Lance Taylor-Warren, of L&L Productions. I was calling his BBS and I paged him to ask him what the latest news was on LLUCE. During the discussion we had, it occurred to me that I was talking to a man who has never received a fair shake from the Apple II world.

Lance Taylor-Warren purchased the rights to GBBS "Pro" many years ago from Greg Schaffer. I may be wrong, but it's certainly possible that since then, GBBS has never seen a profitable year. GBBS's height of popularity, when its sales were highest, was when Greg Schaffer ran the business.

One of the questions I asked Lance during our chat was "If you don't get enough orders for LLUCE, will L&L Productions close its doors?" The answer was that a company would always be around to support GBBS. Despite the poor response to LLUCE, and the fact that GBBS has been a flat seller of late, Lance has stated that he will support those who have paid for their software.

In his own words: "If I do not get enough orders

I will return the ones that I do get. I don't know what I'm going to do in the Apple II world, as it's just not profitable to spend money developing products that are pirated 40 to 1. I'll still be around, just not actively working on any Apple II projects."

It's a sad but accurate statement of the Apple II market today. II users seems to want everything, but we want it all for free. Is it because there are so few of us left that we can't afford to support software companies that support us? Or is it just because we think we've paid our dues, and we deserve support in the form of free software just because we own Apple IIs?

I personally think the Apple IIe or IIgs is the ideal computer for running a BBS, even if the BBS isn't Apple-oriented. Used Apples are fairly cheap, and Apple BBS software, including GBBS, LLUCE, and all of the other choices, beats anything available for the IBM. Lance has suggested the possibility of porting GBBS to IBM. Personally, I hope he doesn't do it. But if he does, he'll have the best IBM BBS software around.

Let's show Lance Taylor-Warren that he doesn't need to go to IBM to make a buck. Let's show him that Apple II software can still be profitable.

We're looking for a few good writers!

Interested in writing an article for *// Sysops*? Interested in a free one-year subscription? If you'd be interested in writing about any of these topics (or any other topic), contact us and we'll give you info on how to write an article for us. We're looking for articles about the following:

- Product reviews (VM, Warp Six, AppleNet, LUCE, more)
- How to run a customer service BBS for a business
- Legal issues a sysop needs to be aware of
- ISDN and what it means for the future of BBSing
- Are telephone companies trying to rip off modem users?
- Editorial articles

Also, if you'd be interested in **advertising** your product in *// Sysops*, contact us. Advertising rates are \$50 for a full page, \$25 for a half page, \$12.50 for a quarter page, etc. You could even advertise your BBS if you wanted to. You provide us with a "camera-ready" or Publish It! copy of your ad, and we'll place it in the newsletter, guaranteed to reach at least 200 sysops. Flyer inserts are also possible.

Vendor List

Names and addresses of organizations mentioned in *// Sysops*.

Alliance International, Inc.
(All)
P.O. Box 20756
Louisville, KY 40250

Andrew Roughan
(Eclipse)
P.O. Box 65
Wahroonga, NSW 2076
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net: posty@socs.uts.edu.au

Elpe Enterprises
(ProLine HW Handshaking Cable)
3788 Elco St.
San Diego, CA 92111-4106
V: (619) 571-0757

InSync Software
(ProTerm)
3035 East Topaz Circle
Phoenix, AZ 85028-4423
V: (602) 992-5515
BBS: (602) 992-9789

L&L Productions
(GBBS "Pro", LUCE)
100 W. Pueblo, Suite 200
Reno, NV 89509
V: (702) 322-5533
BBS: (702) 322-5551

Morgan Davis Group
(ProLine, ModemWorks)
10079 Nuerto
Rancho San Diego, CA 91977-1736
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Niagra Software
(Vantage BBS)
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East Amherst, NY 14051
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2491 San Ramon Valley Blvd.
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net: paulp@pro-palmtree.socal.com

Procyon, Inc.
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1005 N Kingshighway, Suite 309
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V: (314) 334-7078

USRobotics, Inc.
(HST & other modems)
P.O. Box 95734
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V: (800) 342-5877

Wilson Wares
(METAL, Future Vision)
P.O. Box 09693
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